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Christianity, the Friend of the Working Classes.

ADDRESS

OF

HON. CHARLES D. DRAKE,

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Address.

It was a wise thought that placed in the programme of discussions here the broad topic,—Christianity, the Friend of the Working Classes. It was a brave thought as well, to formulate it as an affirmation, rather than as a subject of inquiry; and so hold up before the world a great Bible truth. The choice of the speaker to discuss it may prove to have been less wise. If so, he can only say, "he hath done what he could."

In the working classes the numerical majority, the productive force, and therefore the physical life of any nation, abide. Whatever elevates the spirit, purpose, and morals of those classes, elevates the nation at home and abroad; and, on the other hand, whatever depresses them in spirit, or weakens them in rightful purpose, or degrades them in morals, hurts the nation in a vital part. Hence there is no more pregnant inquiry, than for those things which may justly be called the Friends of the Working Classes. And, when found, they should be embraced and enshrined; for, as working classes must always be, whatever benefits them in any period, sends a venture down the stream of time, which may yield good profit in all the future.

Christianity is the system of doctrines and precepts taught by Jesus Christ. It is to be estimated and judged, not by the glosses, the interpretations, the simulations, or the imputations of men, nor by the halting, inconsistent, and often sinful lives of many of its professed followers; nor even by the lives of the best of its disciples; but by

the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, which are the word of God. From them let us reverently learn how it is that Christianity is the Friend of the Working Classes.

In Nazareth, where he had been brought up, Jesus stood in the synagogue on the sabbath day, and read from the book of the prophet Isaiah, where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." And he closed the book, and sat down. And as the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him, he said unto them, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." And then broke forth from his astonished and wrathful hearers,—"From whence hath this man these things? *Is not this the carpenter?*" And those last words of derision have come down, as it were, along the telephone of the ages, to the ear of every working man and working woman to whom the gospel has come, or ever shall come, announcing Jesus to them as one whose heart would ever sympathize with them in their trials and in their rightful triumphs. Thanks to the enraged and contemptuous Nazarenes for this evidence that Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, was one of the working classes, a mechanic, a carpenter. They could have uttered no words which would have better told the working classes of every age and clime, that the Christianity which this despised and rejected Nazarene came to found, would be a true friend to them.

This bright promise is sustained by the whole body of the Scriptures, far more fully than there is time now to show, or than need be shown in such an assembly as this. Let it suffice for this occasion, first, to point to some of the special needs of the working classes in all places and times; and then prove, in God's own words, that the demands and precepts of Christianity, if met and obeyed by employers and employed, would satisfy those needs to the uttermost.

I. A chief need of all working men and women everywhere is, that their wages be paid. They work for reward, it is their bread. The expectation of reward is to them the vital force of muscle, and sinew, and nerve, and purpose. Take that away, and the brawny arm falls limp, and the deft fingers lose their cunning. For them, and against all employers who wrongfully withhold their wages, hear the voice of God, crying, "Woe unto him that useth his neighbor's services without wages, and giveth him not for his work!" And, as quick payment is the worker's daily need, God says, "The wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning." And, as if "all night" were too long, God speaks again, and says, "At his day thou shalt give him his hire, *neither shall the sun go down upon it;* for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it." And yet further, listen to the Lord's warning of vengeance: "Go to, now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth." And when those cries are heard on high, the rust of the cankered gold and silver will not be the only witness against the rich wrong-doer; but, saith the Lord of hosts, "I will be a swift witness against those that oppress the hireling in his wages: I will come near you to judgment."

II. A second special need of the working classes is security in their industry and their gains: not merely the tardy, uncertain, and often feeble protection afforded by the municipal law, which too often the poor are pecuniarily unable to invoke, but the higher and costless safety resting upon men's obedience in heart and life to the law of God. True, this is the need of all; but it is pre-eminently so of the workers, to whom every hour of peaceful labor, undisturbed by apprehension or remembrance of wrong, is of double value, and every farthing gained is

more than a pound to the rich. Men's laws never have kept pace with men's desires and devices to wrong their fellow-men; nor do they reach the thoughts and intents of the heart; and therefore imperfection is in them all: but "the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul," taking hold of the consciences of men, and implanting within them that fear of God, which is not only the beginning and the instruction of wisdom, but teaches men everywhere to hate and depart from all evil. In this law is the solid hope and defense of the world's workers. Though its converting power has conquered comparatively few of the myriads of earth's people that have been, and though the outlook is not promising for the speedy conversion of the human race; yet none the less should the law of the Lord be held up everywhere and always, till the day, surely to come, of its final and glorious triumph in the regeneration of a fallen world. Standing upon that law, Christianity has ever arrayed itself against every form of spoliation of the worker by the rich and powerful, from the lowest grade of mere injustice up to the highest of lawless rapacity. Let the voice of Christianity's God be again heard: "The Lord will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people and the princes thereof; for the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? Forasmuch as your treading is upon the poor, ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins. Thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbor by extortion, and hast forgotten me. Behold, I have smitten mine hand at thy dishonest gain which thou hast made. Can thine heart endure, or can thy hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it."

III. A third special need of the working classes is some solid foundation for hope of bettering their worldly condition. With the great majority of them the struggle is usually for mere life. The days and months and years of

toil bring them no more than food and raiment; to vast numbers not even that; and life wears away with nothing gained. And vice comes and weaves its subtle and fatal net about them, evil associations grapple them, and Satan rides triumphant upon the wild and turbid currents that sweep them into the abyss of despair and death.

The question, of great and lasting moment to them and to every portion of society, is, not whether the working classes can be lifted bodily into affluence and high social position, for which they would be unfit, and where they would cease to be workers; but how, by what course of their own, by what action of others, they can, as working classes, be raised to a higher plane and a better condition of physical life. Left to fight the sullen and unequal battle of life alone, the most of them have only defeat and disaster in view ahead, from whose blasting sight there is no refuge but the grave. Shall they be so left? Every principle of Christianity, every dictate of mere humanity says, No. What shall come to their help? Shall it be Civilization? Shall it be Philosophy? Shall it be human Morals? Shall it be Philanthropy? Each and all of them, at one time or another, in one country or another, have taken the mighty problem in hand, and, so far, each and all have failed to solve it successfully and finally. The plain and startling truth is, that the spirit of man, in and of itself, is, and must forever be, unequal to its solution. His schemes are as sand, when the vital need is a rock. But what the spirit of man cannot do, the Spirit of God has done. Behold in the Rock of Ages the only stable foundation upon which the world's workers can build a hope of steadily and permanently rising to a higher plane and a better condition of earthly life.

Men might as well, first as last, open their eyes and their hearts to these great truths of God,—that "Righteousness is the habitation of his throne;" that "He that followeth after righteousness findeth life;" that "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever." These truths are precious stones in the foundations of Christianity; and

upon them rests the great proposition, that, except in that righteousness, there is no real and solid basis for hope of the working classes ever being able to gain a condition of higher worldly prosperity, and *abide* there. Some, under favoring circumstances, may achieve success, and obtain riches and honor and power, and so rise above their class; but the rest will be left behind. What is needed is hope for the class; and let them awake to the divine truth, that that hope lies nowhere but in that righteousness; for only in that are found all the principles, motives, purposes, and means which God may be expected to bless with substantial and lasting advancement and prosperity.

But it is not enough that this righteousness be found in the working classes alone. Were every working man and working woman in the whole world a sincere and blameless follower of God, that fact would avail only partially to better their worldly state, unless it were met by a like condition in the rest of the race. Divide mankind to-day equally between the righteous and the unrighteous, and not an hour would pass before it would have to be written on high,—"The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor: he plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth: they have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation." And so, at last, the hope of the working classes for a real and permanent betterment of their worldly condition, must rest on the double foundation of righteousness in themselves, and righteousness in the rest of mankind. This foundation Christianity alone can lay; for it is laid upon Jesus Christ the Rock of Ages; and in all the systems known of men there is no builder upon that Rock, but Christianity.

But through all the long ages, perhaps, that must roll away before the millenial dawn shall herald the day of Christ's universal reign, it is the high and holy mission of Christianity, at all times, in all places whither it may go, against all odds, with one hand to batter down the unjust barriers which the selfish, the grasping, and the rapacious ever seek to rear against the upward progress of the working classes;

and with the other to hail those classes to trust in the Lord, and do good, and wait patiently for him.

Let them hear what Jehovah saith to their oppressors. From out the thunders of Sinai, "*Thou shalt not steal*" forbids oppression, extortion, and all other unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from another what belongs to him. And listen to the repetitions in other words and the enforcements of that commandment: "He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: he shall surely come to want. He that by unjust gain increaseth his substance shall gather it for him that will pity the poor. Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression, and stay thereon, therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant. Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail: the Lord hath sworn, Surely I will never forget any of their works. Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day."

And hear what the Lord saith to them that are oppressed: "The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He delivereth the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea the poor and needy from him that spoileth them. He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. The Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted and the right of the poor. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight."

IV. A fourth special need of the working classes is a fit provision for the poor. It is no more true that "the poor shall never cease out of the land," than that in every land they are to be mainly found in the working classes. Too true is it also, in all lands, that "the rich man's wealth is his strong city, and the poor man's destruction is his pov-

erty;" but nevertheless, the world over, it is of the ordering of Providence, that, while the working classes are dependent, directly or indirectly, upon the rich for employment, and so for livelihood, the rich are just as dependent on them, not only for the revenues that enrich them, but for soldiers and sailors to defend them and their country in time of war. Their wealth is absolutely at the mercy of foreign invaders, or of lawless and ungovernable mobs, springing, as it were, out of the ground at their very doors, unless the working classes rally to their defense. It is, therefore, mere common justice for private and public means to co-operate in providing for the poor. This duty Christianity inculcates by manifold precepts and injunctions. Thus speaks the Lord: "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. He that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord: and that which he hath given will he pay him again. He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse. Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard. Thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thy hand from thy poor brother; but thou shalt open thy hand wide to him." And as the sum of all, the Lord said unto Moses, "Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF": and the Son of man, so poor in his human life that he "had not where to lay his head," repeated the blessed words to his disciples, to be, next to love to God, the very foundation precept of Christianity forever.

V. A fifth special need of the working classes, without which they must suffer both bodily and mental deterioration, is a stated and regularly recurring day of rest from labor. This is not the time for discussing the great subject of the sabbath and its observance. That will be treated here by far abler minds, a few days hence. At present it suffices to consider Sunday simply as a day of rest, with reference to the working classes. On that subject time forbids extended remark; and in fact it is not necessary. It is a law of nature that all men, whether they work

or not, must have rest; and at night they seek and obtain it. But all experience proves that working men and women need more rest than night alone affords; and that therefore it is a necessity to set aside periodically a whole day for cessation from labor. Men and communities that do not acknowledge the obligation of the Christian sabbath, have awaked to the vital importance of Sunday as a day of rest. Said Lord Macauley in the English House of Commons: "We in England are not poorer, but richer, because we have these many ages rested from our labor one day in seven. The day is not lost. While industry is suspended, while the plough lies in the furrow, while the exchange is silent, while no smoke ascends from the factory, a process is going on quite as important to the wealth of nations as any process which is performed on more busy days. Man, the machine of machines, the machine compared with which all contrivances of the Watts and Arkwrights are worthless, is repairing and winding up, so that he returns to his labors on the Monday with clearer intellect, with livelier spirits, with renewed corporeal vigor." This is the judgment and the testimony of a leading English mind from the standpoint of mere political economy; and toward those conclusions all nations having knowledge of Christian civilization are rapidly tending. But they are mere followers. It was the God of Christianity that ordained one day in every seven as a day of rest. It was no device or thought of man; but the offspring of infinite foreknowledge and wisdom, for the physical as well as the spiritual good of the human race, but pre-eminently of the working classes, through all time. And let it be remembered by those classes in every land, that in Christianity is the best safeguard of this ineffable gift of the all-wise Father. If Christianity had no other claim to the title of Friend of the Working Classes, it could triumphantly rest it upon its spirit and works as the defender and conservator of the sabbath.

VI. Finally: The greatest and most urgent need of the working classes, as it is of all men, is RELIGION. Few will dispute this proposition; but when a choice is to be made beween

different forms of religious faith and observance, world-wide differences arise. In the very nature of the case, there can be but one true religion; but many different bodies may each claim, as they do, to be its true representative. The most of Christendom is divided between the Roman church, claiming to be the only true one, and asserting that outside of itself there is no salvation; and the Reformed churches of all names, claiming to be of the church universal; which they hold to consist of all who make profession of the holy religion of Christ, and of submission to his laws. In one or the other of these two great bodies all who call themselves Christians must be ranged; and between them the working classes must choose. To which should they look for spiritual help in their rugged journey of life, and for guidance to the mansions of the blest on high? This is no time or place to hesitate in answering that question according to the faith of the "Reformed Churches throughout the world holding the Presbyterian system," and composing this ALLIANCE. Those churches hold, that the religion best suited to the working classes, and all other classes of men, is not that which bows down to a man, deified by men as infallible, and holding himself aloft as God's vicegerent on earth; but one which worships God alone. Nor is it a religion of a dominating hierarchy, pronouncing its decrees and conducting its worship in a tongue unknown to the common people; but one whose humble ministers carry the word of God to the poor, as did their divine Master, in the language of their every-day life. Nor is it a religion promising salvation through the intercession of a woman, or of a priest, or of saints, or of angels; but one resting on the intercession of the great "High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus," alone. Nor is it a religion which shuts the Bible to the people, and commands them to look to pontiffs, prelates, and priests to learn what God says to man; but one that opens God's holy word to all human creatures, and would lovingly put it into the hand of every man, woman, and child, to read, learn, and understand for themselves. Nor is it a religion of pictures and images and relics, that hides away from its votaries the second commandment of the Decalogue; but one that says to its fol-

lowers, as God said to his people Israel, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." Nor is it a religion claiming that poor sinful man's works of merit may bring God in debt to him for eternal life; but one that humbles the lost sinner at the foot of the cross, there to find rest and peace to his soul through the blood of the once crucified, but now risen and exalted Redeemer of men. This is the religion which meets the soul-needs of the poor and lowly. It sees their low estate, and says to them, "He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly shall dwell on high, and his eyes shall behold the King in his beauty." It knows their troubles and their conflicts, and shows them the Prince of Peace. It knows their sorrows, and brings to them the Man of sorrows, who was acquainted with grief heavier than theirs. It knows their darkness, and tells them, "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings." It knows their sins, and points them to the Friend of sinners. It knows their tears, and says, "God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes." It knows their days and night of weariness, and bids them hear the Saviour's loving call, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It knows the thirst of their souls, and says to them, "Thirst no more, for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall lead you unto living fountains of waters." To those heavenly fountains, hear the hail of the Son of man to the sons of toil in all time in all the earth: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

This is the voice of that Christianity which is the Friend of the Working Classes in all earth's nations. For it, "let everything that hath breath praise the Lord."

And now, let the whole world stand forth before God, and say whether, if the commands, and precepts, and promises of God, as they have now been passed in review, were

henceforth obeyed, lived out, and rested upon by all, the certain result would not be the speedy and lasting rise of the working classes in physical power, in intellectual strength, in material prosperity, in moral force, and, consequently, in influence in all the world's affairs.

And again let the whole world stand forth before God, and say what else than Christianity, that mortal man has ever known or heard of, has, in all the history of humanity, anywhere led, or can ever, in all the long hereafter of time, be rationally expected to lead those classes upward to that higher and nobler destiny.

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